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Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report details the significant progress being made to reposition the Department of Public Information to meet the communications challenges of the Organization with a renewed focus and greater clarity of purpose. It builds upon the previous reorientation report (A/AC.198/2002/2), which offered a preliminary outline of the findings of the comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department, as well as possible strategic actions to be taken as a result.

The present report details the next phase of the departmental reform and sets out the steps being taken to implement the actions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387 and Corr.1), as they apply to the Department.

The new mission statement for the Department, which will be its guiding precept, as well as its revised operating model and the new organizational structure based upon it, are set out in the report. The key elements of the structure are a Strategic Communications Division, which will devise and disseminate United Nations messages around priority United Nations themes; an Outreach Division to encompass services to delegations, liaison with civil society and activities for the general public; and a News and Media Division that has, among other things, been strengthened by the creation of a new Internet Service, which will enhance the Division's ability to communicate with media around the world on important news development in the United Nations system. The report further details a new operating concept for the United Nations information centres around regional hubs and the intention to redeploy resources which would be freed as a result to areas of higher priority, including centres in developing countries, the United Nations web site and the systematic evaluation of the impact of the Department's activities.

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The report concludes that the Department of Public Information has worked with a renewed sense of mission under its reformed structure since 1 November 2002. At the same time, the guidance of the Committee on Information is being sought for the next phase of departmental reform, as is its support for the public information section of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, which reflects the Department's new priorities.

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 57/130 B of 11 December 2002, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, including wide-ranging and possibly new and innovative proposals and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session. In paragraph 14, it noted the intention of the Secretary-General to conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information, taking into account the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, and to report thereon at its fifty-seventh session in accordance with its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, and recognized that the comprehensive review of the Department is intended to facilitate the process of reorientation. Furthermore, in paragraph 15, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information to examine thoroughly the comprehensive review once it has been finalized and to submit its recommendations thereon to the Assembly.

2. In paragraph 20, the General Assembly also emphasized that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation contributes to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications.

3. It should also be noted that in several paragraphs of its resolution 57/130 B, the General Assembly called on the Department to provide specific information to the Committee on Information in the context of the present report. In that connection, in paragraph 38, the Secretary-General was requested to provide the results of the ongoing review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat regarding the United Nations information centres, as well as information on the involvement of the Department of Public Information in the United Nations houses initiative. In paragraph 59, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to include in his comprehensive review the relevant results of the larger review of United Nations publications and information materials called for in its resolution 56/253. Regarding the latter request, the preliminary findings have been summarized in chapter II.C of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387 and Corr.1) under the sub-heading "Improving oversight of publications", and a further report will be submitted to the Assembly by mid-2003.

4. In paragraph 66, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the most practical, efficient and cost-effective means of implementing his proposal to translate into all official languages all English materials and databases on the United Nations web site by the respective content-providing offices of the Secretariat. In paragraph 67, it requested the Secretary-General to include in his report proposals relating to the designation of a date by which all supporting arrangements would be in place for the implementation of that concept. In paragraph 70, the Assembly noted that the High-Level Committee on Management had requested its Technical Adviser to prepare and submit to it a preliminary study on one central Internet portal for the United Nations system. In paragraph 74, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the impact on the

functioning of the Official Document System (ODS) following implementation of the full multilingual support function and on the feasibility of providing free, public access to the System through a linkage with the United Nations web site. The information on the portal and the ODS is contained in annex II to the present report.

5. Moreover, the General Assembly, in paragraph 15 of its resolution 57/300 of 20 December 2002 on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change, requested the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of his proposal to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs, where appropriate, and in paragraph 17 requested him to report on progress made to conduct a systematic evaluation of the impact, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of all activities of the Department of Public Information. On 10 January 2003, it was decided at a meeting of the Bureau of the Committee on Information that that information would be presented to the Committee at its twenty-fifth session as part of the present report.

II. Comprehensive review — status of implementation

6. In his report on reorientation to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session (A/AC.198/2002/2), reflecting the first stage of the comprehensive review, the Secretary-General set out his vision for the direction in which he hoped to take a transformed Department of Public Information — one with a renewed focus and a greater clarity of purpose. The Committee discussed in detail the preliminary outline of the principal issues and findings emerging from the comprehensive review, as well as the strategic actions being considered by the Department as a result.

7. The Secretary-General took the process further in his reform report, in which he identified the Department of Public Information as one area to be reviewed in greater detail in the course of strengthening the United Nations. The Secretary-General's report contains the principal conclusions of the comprehensive review conducted on the management and operations of the Department of Public Information.

8. In the report, it is explained that the Department of Public Information has suffered from a fragmentation of its efforts as a result of too many mandates and missions and is being restructured to be better able to develop coherent communications strategies and take advantage of new media and communications technologies. A comprehensive evaluation of the impact of all of the Department's activities will be carried out over the next three years. The existing network of United Nations information centres will be rationalized around regional hubs, starting with Western Europe, and the Secretary-General will also introduce improvements in the management of United Nations libraries and the Secretariat's publications programme.

9. Subsequently, the General Assembly, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 57/300, welcomed the proposals of the Secretary-General to improve the effective and targeted delivery of public information activities, including the restructuring of the Department of Public Information, and provided some additional guidelines.

10. The present report describes the steps being taken to implement the actions in the Secretary-General's reform report which apply to the Department of Public

Information. Section III sets out the new mission statement for the Department, which will be a guiding precept for all its work, and presents the new operating model chosen to reposition the Department. Section IV describes a new operating concept for the United Nations information centres around regional hubs and the proposal to redeploy resources which would be freed as a result to areas of higher priority, including centres in developing countries, the United Nations web site and the systematic evaluation of the impact of the Department's activities.

III. Repositioning the Department of Public Information

11. To help clarify the goals and purposes of the Department of Public Information and to enhance its overall effectiveness and efficiency, a clear mission statement has now been formulated, as follows:

> *"The Department of Public Information's mission is to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact."*

The statement recognizes that the Department's work is not an end in itself and that the information which the Department must communicate is generated by the substantive work of the Organization and its component parts. The Department must therefore manage and coordinate information from various United Nations sources with a view to conveying it to the public. The intention is that the Department will work strategically, emphasizing the broader picture, with the Organization's overall goals in mind. Though the mission statement does not spell it out, the Department will use appropriate intermediaries as necessary in order to leverage its activities and achieve the greatest public impact.

12. In adhering to its new mission statement, the Department of Public Information will be guided by the priorities laid down by the General Assembly and those established by the Secretary-General at the beginning of his second term of office. The Department's core "message", with the United Nations Millennium Declaration as its guide, will focus on: the eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent. The Department must enhance its expertise in regard to those issues, in cooperation with the relevant substantive Secretariat departments and offices and organizations of the United Nations system, and establish the capacity to devise and implement communications strategies to promote the work of the United Nations in those areas. In addition, the Department must be equipped to respond to unpredictable and fast-moving events around the world by providing information services to the media, Member States, non-governmental organizations and the public on United Nations actions in those critical situations. Finally, the Department will continue to pay special attention to ensure that gender mainstreaming is incorporated into the design of public information products and activities.

13. To fulfil its mission, it has been indicated in the comprehensive review that the Department of Public Information must continue to disseminate the United Nations message through a variety of communications means, taking into account the needs of its various target audiences. They should include the traditional means of communication, inter alia, print materials, ranging from press releases to hard cover

publications, radio programmes (especially live broadcasts) and television materials, as well as Internet material on www.un.org and associated sites, notably the United Nations News Centre and those of The UN Works programme and the *UN Chronicle*. However, the level of the resources allocated to each function will be readjusted as part of a process of continuing review.

14. As an embodiment of the mission of the Department of Public Information, the Secretary-General has approved a new operating model for the Department. It is based on a clear conception of the Department's role and an elaboration of its functions in a manner that emphasizes the Organization's communications needs, while also providing the expected services to Member States. That model further recognizes that content generation emanates from the other departments and offices of the Secretariat and organizations of the United Nations system, while content coordination and refinement, as well as content presentation and distribution, are the responsibility of the Department, working in close cooperation with the media, Member States and civil society partners.

15. A new organizational structure for the Department of Public Information, based on the revised operating model, which includes a Strategic Communications Division, a News and Media Division and an Outreach Division, was put into effect as of 1 November 2002. It should be noted that the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General remains administratively within, and works in close synergy with, the Department of Public Information, although it continues to report directly to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

A. Strategic Communications Division

16. The Strategic Communications Division has been established to devise and disseminate United Nations messages centred around priority themes. It is staffed by communications professionals who specialize in the substantive areas of the Organization's work and function in close cooperation with the relevant substantive departments and offices. The Division develops communications strategies to promote the work of the United Nations on priority issues, using the United Nations Millennium Declaration as its guide. In order to integrate the United Nations information centres into the Organization's communications strategy, the Information Centres Service and the network of information centres, services and information components of United Nations Offices have become an integral part of the new Division. A Committee Liaison Unit, which includes the secretariats of the Committee on Information and of the United Nations Communications Group, is also part of the Division. The former Public Affairs Division has been abolished and its functions divided between the new Division and the new Outreach Division detailed below.

17. The Strategic Communications Division is tasked with ensuring that communications is placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations. The activities and programmes of the Department of Public Information will succeed only if the Secretariat as a whole reflects the Secretary-General's desire to create a culture of communications within the Organization.

18. The Division functions as the secretariat of the United Nations Communications Group, the new mechanism for inter-agency coordination in the field of public information and communications, which replaced the Joint United

Nations Information Committee. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information chairs its weekly meetings at Headquarters. Those meetings bring together communications professionals from within the United Nations Secretariat and the wider system to share common communications concerns and to develop joint strategies, thereby enabling the United Nations system to speak increasingly with one voice when conveying its core messages. In a related measure, the head of the Department is also the Chairman of an inter-agency task force to ensure a coordinated, coherent and, above all, strategic approach to the system's public information work on the situation in Iraq.

19. Strengthened coordination between the Department of Public Information and other Secretariat departments is essential for the development of an effective United Nations outreach to the world public. The Strategic Communications Division exists primarily to undertake that task and to serve as the interface with the other Secretariat departments. To serve each client office, the Division has identified a focal point in one of the four sections of the Communications Campaign Service, which cover development; Palestine, decolonization and human rights; peace and security; and Africa. It will be the job of the focal point to be knowledgeable on the priority issues and activities of the client office. The Department of Public Information will hold an annual meeting with each client department, at the head of department level, to outline the year's activities and to decide on communications priorities. The meetings will be preceded by meetings at the working level to elaborate creative briefs for each client office. The focal points, in close collaboration with the client offices, and on the basis of the annual meeting, will identify the target audiences and develop the information programme and media strategy for each priority issue. That will be communicated to the other divisions of the Department of Public Information and to the United Nations system through the United Nations Communications Group.

20. The thematic promotional campaigns will be implemented using all the Department's assets, including its multimedia outlets (print, radio, television, Internet), outreach to civil society, private sector partnerships and, at the local level, the United Nations information centres. That successful approach was used by the Department during the past few years to promote major United Nations global conferences. A new issue-driven communications strategy for each department, rather than one which is event-driven, is being developed to promote the Organization's work, building on the experience and success of the global conferences campaigns.

21. In addition, the ongoing activities included in the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 will be implemented, including the publication of the quarterly magazine *Africa Recovery* in English and French, which will now serve as one of the outputs of a new Africa Section, devoted to promoting Africa's development. Other continuing mandated activities include the annual Palestinian media practitioners training programme, the annual international media seminar on peace in the Middle East, the annual *Year in Review* publication about United Nations peace operations and the updating of current publications on various thematic issues.

22. Information and operational support for the information component of field missions will continue to be a core function of the Peace and Security Section, including assisting missions in the creation and updating of their web sites, assistance in training, the creation of information tools and the promotion of

missions through outreach to the international media. Planning for the information component of new missions, in particular the development of a rapid deployment capability, is a continuing focus for the Section. For instance, it helped design the information sector of the logistic headquarters of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in Brindisi, Italy, and is planning a conference this year for organizations interested in rapid deployment to assist media during humanitarian crises and in conflict areas.

23. The Department is also contributing to conflict prevention work, currently in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, where it has sent an information officer to begin work with local media and United Nations Offices to reduce hate speech. The Department has undertaken media monitoring and will deploy an information officer as part of the United Nations assessment team to analyse the way forward in terms of resolving the current crisis.

24. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/238 of 20 December 2002 on the World Summit on the Information Society, the Department of Public Information is cooperating closely with the International Telecommunication Union to launch a public information campaign to raise global awareness of the Summit, within existing resources and through voluntary contributions. The campaign aims to underscore how communications technologies can help the world attain the Millennium Development Goals. The Department will contribute to the first phase of the Summit, to be held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, by organizing a side event, the World Electronic Media Forum, on the role of the electronic media in the information society. The Forum is being organized in partnership with the television industry and Switzerland, which has already made a sizeable contribution to its organization, and will bring together media executives and practitioners from developed and developing countries, as well as other policy makers and representatives of the United Nations system.

25. As mentioned in paragraph 16, the Division includes the Information Centres Service, which manages the administrative, programme and dissemination functions of the global network of United Nations information centres. The centres, services and information components of United Nations Offices work through intermediaries, such as the media and local partners, to adapt global communications strategies to local audiences. The new approach to the management of the information centres is described in detail in section IV below (see paras. 39-46).

B. News and Media Division

26. The central objective of the News and Media Division is the delivery, in real time, of accurate, objective and balanced news and information to the media and other audiences worldwide. The Division is carrying out that objective in the context of the Internet-driven 24-hour news cycle, through the immediate dissemination in all four mass media — print, radio, television and Internet — of news emanating from the United Nations system. Such rapid dissemination of authoritative information materials is essential if we are to meet our goal of projecting to the media the centrality of the United Nations as it deliberates and takes action on the compelling issues of our time.

27. To that end, the Division is developing new synergies to use the full potential of all available channels of communication — both new and traditional — so that

they can meet the varied and constantly growing demands of its users. The creation of an Internet Service, comprised of the News Services and the Website Sections, has greatly facilitated the new approach. Television and photo systems are being modernized through a conversion to digital technology and the development of an integrated production system. At the same time, the opportunities provided by the Internet — including increasingly in the developing world — are being realized through the development of a fully multimedia web site, with increased webcasting capacity. In the field of content creation, the focus is on the development of products and services in the languages, formats and packages that ensure their most effective distribution to, and use by, disseminators and end-users.

28. The effectiveness of that approach is illustrated, in part, by the latest advances in the development of the United Nations News Centre on the web site, including the new United Nations News Service, which now delivers news throughout the day to over 10,000 subscribers in 130 countries who have signed on in the nine months since the News Service was launched. The Arabic version of the News Centre was launched in January 2003 and work is under way to create similar dynamic database-driven sites in the remaining three official languages. That has become possible thanks to increased cooperation between the Internet Service and the Meetings Coverage and United Nations Radio Sections — a collaboration that makes efficient use of the language and news and information generating capacities of the Division. The position of Deputy Director has been created to assist in ensuring the management of the implementation of such cross-cutting initiatives.

29. Developments in the production and dissemination of the Division's products are complemented by continually expanding partnerships with broadcasters and other promotional activities. The effectiveness of those efforts is demonstrated on a daily basis through the live images of meetings at Headquarters — and such video products as the United Nations in Action — broadcast on major stations throughout the world; the expanding partnerships for United Nations Radio's live programmes on all continents; the increasing accesses to the United Nations News Centre; and wider viewing of the live webcasts.

C. Outreach Division

30. Through the Outreach Division, which combines much of the former Library and Information Resources Division with the functions previously carried out by the Public Liaison Service of the Public Affairs Division, the Department is placing new emphasis upon its relations with its partners and clients external to the Organization. Providing services to delegations as well as to the full range of civil society and the public at large, the Division focuses on information delivery, whether it is directly to the audience concerned or through key intermediaries, such as non-governmental organizations, the academic community, the media or an expanding network of depository libraries. The growing importance of civil society in the world today and its relation to the work of the Organization is recognized in the creation of a Civil Society Service. The Service brings together under one umbrella the new Educational Outreach Section, The UN Works programme, partnerships with the private sector, ongoing programmes such as those for non-governmental organizations, as well as special programmes and observances, exhibits, guided tours, the work of the United Nations speakers' bureau and other services to the public. In addition, the Organization's graphic design requirements, so essential to

the visual communication of the United Nations story, will be met to the greatest extent possible within the Division.

31. The Organization has already begun to reap the benefits of the new Division with greater synergy among the respective operations and new opportunities to expand the audience for its programmes and services. The Educational Outreach Section is strengthening relationships with the academic community in a variety of ways, among them, working closely with the Group Programmes Unit, through its briefings and videoconferences, as well as with the NGO Section, which counts university and other academic groups among those organizations associated with the Department. Within the Educational Outreach Section, its flagship publication, the *UN Chronicle*, presents articles authored by prominent scholars and politicians that serve to inform and stimulate debate on issues of global concern. In addition to the print version, the *Chronicle* will continue to be available to a larger global audience through its online edition and the worldwide republication of articles provided by its Feature Service. Similarly capitalizing on the reach and immediacy afforded by electronic media, The UN Works programme maintains a very visible presence on the United Nations web site and is collaborating with media and entertainment entities to convey the Organization's message in ways that are accessible and appealing to the public at large.

32. Working with partners has always been a key ingredient in the programmes undertaken by the Civil Society Service. That aspect remains as important as ever as the Department seeks to develop new partnerships, in particular with the private sector, and to use such support to help maximize the impact of its own information activities.

33. One long-standing programme that has benefited from that kind of support, especially in the face of rising costs and shrinking resources, is the Department's Training Programme for Broadcasters and Journalists from Developing Countries, in which more than 300 journalists from 140 countries have participated. In the past, the Department has sponsored 16 junior and mid-level media professionals for the six-week programme, which provides its participants with in-depth knowledge of the work of the United Nations system. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation has sponsored an additional four, for a total of 20 — the maximum, as experience has shown, for the group to remain manageable and productive. In recent years, however, the Department has been able to sponsor only 12 journalists per year from the resources available for the programme. Should additional resources become available for that activity, the Department will once again host an optimum number of journalists for the programme. (Individual Member States may also wish to consider sponsoring journalists from developing countries to take part in the programme.)

34. The Department will also actively pursue widening the reach of its publications through an energized and constantly updated web site, as well as by placing their contents as syndicated features in publications around the world, with the assistance of the United Nations information centres. The sales and marketing of publications, an income-generating activity, will be located in the Outreach Division. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as a key part of the Division, is emphasizing its service to delegations, Secretariat staff, scholars, depository libraries and the general public. It will play an increasing role in enhancing the knowledge management capacity of the Organization.

35. Last year's in-depth review of all United Nations libraries highlighted two major areas in need of attention: lack of integrated management and a need for further modernization. Recognizing that, the Secretary-General, in his reform report, called for specific measures to improve the provision of library services. As a first step in the implementation of those proposals, a Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, to be chaired by the Department of Public Information, was established. The Committee, in which are represented the libraries in the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, the United Nations Environment Programme, the regional economic commissions and the United Nations University as well as the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, will design, develop and implement strategies to achieve a more modern, efficient and accessible system of library services in the United Nations. A separate report on the integrated management of United Nations libraries (A/AC.198/2003/5) is being submitted to the Committee on Information.

36. The Secretary-General's report on reform has called for improved oversight of publications in the belief that the key challenge is to get the right publication to the right reader at the right time. The Executive Committees will now be called upon to plan and coordinate all publications within their respective thematic areas in order to reduce their number and improve the coherence, focus and scheduling among the Organization's many publications. The Department of Public Information has, in turn, made proposals for reconstituting the Publications Board, which is organizationally located within the Outreach Division, as a standard-setting body, with appropriate membership and terms of reference.

37. The functions formerly performed by the Production and Coordination Unit have been eliminated or, as necessary, handled elsewhere. The Secretary-General is also proposing the transfer of the functions and resources of the Cartographic Section from the Department of Public Information to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, since the Section's outputs are more closely aligned to the needs and activities of that Department. That change will be reflected in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

IV. Activities of higher priority

A. United Nations information centres

38. The United Nations information centres, the United Nations information services and the information components of the United Nations field offices serve as branch offices of the Department. As such, they are integral to the implementation of the Department's strategies and the work of its divisions in reaching key constituencies at the local level. The recent report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations laid out a proposal for restructuring the network of information centres, recognizing that the Organization must do a better job at strengthening its communications beyond Headquarters. The report proposed the idea of rationalizing the network of information centres around regional hubs, starting with the creation of a Western European hub.

39. The Department is preparing to implement the Secretary-General's proposal, starting with a regional hub to serve member countries of the European Union. The new operating concept will also aim to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources to information centres in all regions and the redeployment of resources to other high priority activities. They include priorities such as advances in multilingualism on the United Nations web site and the systematic evaluation of the impact of major product and service lines, in accordance with results-based management — activities which have been strongly supported by Member States, but for which additional resources are not available.

40. United Nations information centres have a vital role to play in communicating United Nations messages, countering misperceptions and functioning as points of access to United Nations material and data. The three principal reasons for moving towards regional hubs, therefore, are:

- To take advantage of a vastly altered world media landscape — including revolutionary advances in the technologies available to disseminate and communicate information
- To establish a smaller number of strategically located centres with a critical mass of staff and resources to allow for greater total impact than the existing network of smaller, poorly resourced centres
- To redistribute scarce resources away from centres in developed countries, which currently account for approximately 35 per cent of all expenditures for the centres, to information activities of higher priority.

41. In its resolution 57/300, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of the proposal, with the objective of applying the initiative to other regions, where it will strengthen the flow and exchange of information in developing countries. More detailed guidelines and criteria for the regionalization of the United Nations information centres are contained in annex I to the present report, as requested in paragraph 44 of resolution 57/130 B. The Secretary-General proposes that those criteria be used to guide the application of the hub approach in other regions over the next three years, in consultation with concerned Member States.

42. Regarding the creation of the Western European hub, the Department is currently developing plans involving the closure of the nine existing centres located in the States members of the European Union and the creation of a regional hub. The proposal does not include the information services in Geneva and Vienna, as they perform essential functions for the large United Nations presences in those cities. As recommended by the General Assembly, the Department is assuming that the hub would be provided with rent-free premises by the host Government. One State member of the European Union has already offered premises in its capital.

43. The new operating model would release staff and financial resources that could be redeployed to:

- Centres in developing countries, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, thereby enabling them to deliver more effective and targeted programmes at a crucial time
- Strengthening the United Nations web site (particularly to enhance multilingualism, as has been previously requested by the General Assembly)

- Establishing a more robust system of evaluation and impact assessment for each of the many service and product lines of the Department of Public Information.

44. As requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 38 of its resolution 57/130 B, the results of the OIOS review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres are provided in A/57/747, which is being submitted separately to the Committee on Information. The findings and recommendations of that review were fully taken into account in carrying out the comprehensive review of the Department of Public Information.

45. In the context of overall human resources reform, the Department also plans to create a mechanism to promote the rotation of staff to and from the field. In a related initiative, limits will be placed on the number of years the director of a centre can serve in any one location.

46. During the period under review, the Department has continued to support the consolidation of the United Nations field presence in a single United Nations house. Taking into account location, costs, and space requirements, wherever feasible, the information centre is located in a United Nations house. As of 1 October 2002, 24 information centres shared premises with other United Nations agencies in United Nations houses.

B. United Nations web site

47. The United Nations web site reached yet another milestone on 5 February 2003, by recording more than 10 million accesses during a 24-hour period. In contrast, the site had received 11.5 million accesses during the entire year in 1996. (The corresponding figure for 2002 is 1,695 million, or 1.7 billion accesses.) The web site has become a very cost-effective medium to disseminate information about the activities of the United Nations to far corners of the world at a continually decreasing cost per unit. With the improvement in connectivity, increasing numbers of users from developing countries are gaining access to that important resource.

48. In keeping with the expressed wishes of Member States, the Department has continued its efforts to enhance parity among the official languages on the United Nations web site. At the request of the Fifth Committee, the Secretary-General, in paragraph 8 of his report contained in document A/57/355, presented proposals for strengthening the Department of Public Information to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization, indicating that the current resource capacity of the Department in regard to language capability for the web site is barely at the maintenance level and is not adequate to sustain the rapid expansion in the use of the web site or to keep pace with the daily addition of new material occurring in all the official languages. The Secretary-General recommended that additional resources in the total amount of $1,297,500 would need to be identified.

49. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in its report of 10 October 2002 (A/57/7/Add.2), recommended that the Secretary-General proceed to implement his proposal on the web site and report on the budgetary requirements, if any, in the context of the second performance report for the biennium 2002-2003. Subsequently, the General Assembly, in its decision 57/579 of

20 December 2002, requested the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of his proposal on strengthening the web site through the redeployment of resources within the Department of Public Information, giving priority to the language posts required, and to report on the status of implementation to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

50. The Department is implementing innovative approaches towards achieving the goal of multilingualism within its existing resources. The first priority, if the current level of activity is to be maintained, is to institutionalize the language capacity of the Website Section on a sound, sustainable and regular basis, through the allocation of regular posts for the language assistants who are currently on general temporary assistance. General Service posts are therefore being redeployed to the Department's Website Section to redress that situation and have been reflected in the budget proposals for the biennium 2004-2005.

51. The possibility that resources freed by the creation of a regional information hub in Western Europe could be redirected to certain United Nations information centres to increase language parity is also under consideration. To that end, the Department intends to undertake a pilot exercise in one duty station, once resources are available, to test the viability of that concept. If successful, it will be expanded to other duty stations. However, it must be stressed that only functions of a routine nature can be decentralized. A number of functions, including design, programming and editorial control, will remain a Headquarters function.

52. Another key component of the Department's plan to strengthen language parity on the United Nations home page is the expansion of the United Nations News Centre into all official languages. That is an excellent opportunity, since the News Centre is one of the most popular United Nations sites and serves as a gateway to other information sources system-wide. With the use of some limited resources released from the consolidation of the United Nations information centres, resources will be redeployed to ensure the daily functioning of the News Centre and to provide additional capacity for the other portions of the web site in the various languages. The synergies increasingly permitted by new technologies are being realized through increased coordination between news producing units and the Website Section, facilitated by the creation of the Internet Service, to achieve that objective within existing sources. However, it should be stressed that, given the intense demands of today's 24-hour news cycle, such an approach is highly vulnerable to disruption.

53. The Department is increasingly using the academic community worldwide to expand its language capacity. It has concluded an agreement with the University of Salamanca in Spain by which its School of Languages has provided over 1,200 pages of material translated into Spanish, at no cost to the Organization. A similar agreement is pending with a university in Egypt and the Department is aggressively pursuing that strategy with other universities for similar translation arrangements into the other languages. While that action is increasing the available material in the official languages, the need for editorial control, programming and processing places an additional workload on the existing staff resources.

54. Achieving greater parity on the United Nations web site cannot be the responsibility of the Department of Public Information alone, since other departments bear primary responsibility for the contents of pages relating to their work. The Department of Public Information is therefore working in close coordination with other departments throughout the Secretariat, encouraging and

assisting them to increase the availability of their materials in all official languages. A number of departments have indicated increased provisions in their budget for the biennium 2004-2005 to help meet that goal.

55. In the next few months, with the assistance of pro bono services, a thorough analysis of the web site will be carried out. The study, to be conducted across departments in the Secretariat, will formulate realistic proposals for redesigning, restructuring and refocusing the web site, including in relation to multilingualism, together with the necessary hardware and connectivity requirements, and the time frame for implementation, as well as for delineating the comprehensive additional resource investments essential for the achievement of that objective across the entire web site operation.

56. The realignment of priorities will serve two purposes: (a) to increase synergies and boost the team approach; and (b) to position Internet capacity to take advantage of evolving technology. The ultimate objective is to take the web site into the next phase, where a technologically sound, continually updated, intuitive and user-friendly site is available to users in their choice of language.

C. Performance management

57. The Department is currently in the process of formulating methodologies and plans to conduct a "systematic evaluation of the impact, efficiency and cost-effectiveness" of the Department's activities over a three-year period (resolution 57/300, para. 17), with assistance from the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

58. The Department of Public Information has also introduced an annual programme impact review, in response to the Secretary-General's appeal to ensure the alignment of the Organization's activities with its priorities. That annual process makes self-evaluation a part of the daily work of all programme managers in the Department with a view to institutionalizing performance management. To that end, the Department has agreed to be one of the pilots of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, as it looks to update and promote the monitoring and self-evaluation within a results-based framework.

59. The Department of Public Information will need to find the resources to promote evaluation as a managerial tool, to make it an integral part of production and planning, without jeopardizing programme delivery. For that purpose, the Department will seek to reallocate some of the resources released by the consolidation of United Nations information centres to ensure that the systematic evaluation of its activities is adequately funded.

V. Conclusions

60. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report on reform, the aspects of the comprehensive review which were within the authority of the Secretary-General have now been implemented. Those steps were taken on the basis of existing General Assembly resolutions and were inspired by the discussions in the Committee on Information. The Department of Public Information has worked with a renewed sense of mission under its reformed structure since 1 November 2002.

61. As the reform of the Department of Public Information enters its next phase, a number of the proposals will be considered in the context of the General Assembly's consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

62. It is the view of the Secretary-General that the transformation of the Department of Public Information, as outlined in the present report, is the best way to ensure that the United Nations has the most effective communications mechanisms in place to meet the challenges of tomorrow. At this crucial time in the Organization's history, it is clear that the United Nations cannot succeed in fulfilling its goals without being able to communicate its work effectively to the world's peoples, in whose name the Charter was adopted. Meeting that challenge will be the principal responsibility of the new Department of Public Information.

Annex I

Guidelines and criteria for the regionalization of United Nations information centres

- The human and financial resources allocated to a regional hub must be significantly more than the best-equipped United Nations information centre under current circumstances. It should have the capacity to produce and disseminate information materials and the professional capability to maintain productive contacts with media in the region, as well as academic institutions and non-governmental organizations
- In a region with a common language, the hub shall be a centre for producing or adapting materials in that language, for use both in the region covered by the hub as well as in other parts of the world. Where there is more than one language, the hub should have the resources to undertake needed translations
- A regional hub should have the necessary facilities to serve as a fully resourced reference centre for United Nations information
- The host country would ideally have well-developed transportation and aerial links with the rest of the region, a relatively well-developed media landscape and modern communications systems, including connectivity, and active civil society institutions
- The existence of other United Nations offices, and regional organizations, may also be a factor in deciding on the optimum location of a hub
- Regional political considerations will also be taken into account
- The cost of a regional hub, including the provision of rent-free premises, would be an important factor
- To extend its reach, the regional information hub will collaborate closely with the country offices of United Nations Resident Coordinators, where they exist, and can engage in partnerships with national institutions and organizations including United Nations Associations
- Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/300, the Department of Public Information will consult with concerned Member States on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs.

Annex II

Official Document System

1. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on re-engineering of the optical disk system (A/56/120/Rev.1) in 2000, the Information Technology Services Division initiated the re-engineering of the optical disk system in two phases in order to upgrade the existing proprietary system to a new open system. On 4 September 2001, phase 1 was completed and the newly re-engineered "Official Document System" (ODS) commenced its production operations, bringing significant improvements in performance, maintainability, reliability and scalability. On 4 February 2002, phase 2 was completed and the new multilingual ODS started its production operations, fully utilizing the advantage of the Lotus Notes multilingual capability, allowing users to select any of the six official languages.

2. The re-engineered ODS has made it possible to link directly to documents on ODS from the United Nations web site, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on the simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages of the United Nations (A/C.5/56/12). The direct access function, available in the six official languages, began on 5 June 2002 and has been incorporated into other specialized web sites of the United Nations (e.g., UNBISnet and the web sites of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), making it easy to link all language versions of documents from the United Nations web sites, thereby facilitating the equal treatment of all official languages on those sites. The new Web publishing technical guideline, which is being finalized by the Working Group on Internet Matters, mandates that direct access function as the means of placing the official documents on the United Nations web sites.

3. Currently, ODS is a subscription-based service. While Member States and United Nations staff members can use ODS free of charge, other users must subscribe to the ODS service for a fee. By thus limiting the number of ODS users, the current ODS system infrastructure can handle the access load quite reliably. Such limits do not, however, permit the use of ODS as a general public information tool.

4. Therefore, free ODS access is desired, making ODS material available to general users and permitting anyone in the world to access ODS free of charge through the Internet, while retaining user identifications for those who need to access documents not available to the public. As a result, the number of potential ODS users will increase drastically. The current ODS system infrastructure will not be able to handle such an increased load from free ODS access. Thus, the current ODS system infrastructure will have to be upgraded.

5. The Information Technology Services Division has requested $1,530,000 for the implementation of free ODS access in the budget for the biennium 2004-2005. That includes the costs of upgrading the ODS system infrastructure for better performance, reliability and disaster-readiness with a number of new high-end servers and new or additional equipment for storage and disaster-readiness. It is envisioned that in the fourth quarter of 2004, the implementation of free ODS access will be completed, provided that the General Assembly approves the proposed resources.

United Nations portal

6. At its third session (New York, 4-5 March 2002), the High-Level Committee on Management asked for a feasibility and cost/benefit analysis of developing an inter-agency search facility, across the public web sites of all United Nations system organizations. In the light of the Secretariat's negotiations with Google, United Nations system information and communications technology managers meeting in Geneva in May 2002 recommended that the Secretariat take the lead in investigating solutions (and the financing of those solutions) for a system-wide search engine.

7. On the basis of comparative analyses of the technological capabilities and pricing schemes offered by a number of providers, the Secretariat, as task manager, recommended to the High-Level Committee that Google most closely met the requirements for a United Nations system search engine. It further proposed that the United Nations system search engine be piloted through the Google search appliance being procured for the United Nations web sites. The Secretariat also determined that an appropriate cost-sharing arrangement would need to be determined, based on the capacity requirements of participating organizations, taking into account the central administration costs of the Secretariat.

8. At its fourth meeting (Geneva, 7-8 October 2002), the High-Level Committee endorsed the concept of a search engine for the United Nations system as a whole and noted that, based upon full technical analysis, the United Nations considered that Google fulfilled the search engine requirements for the United Nations system. The High-Level Committee also requested that detailed proposals of the costs and time frame for implementation of a system-wide search capability be presented to the Committee at a future session, taking into account the Secretariat's experience with the Google system.

9. The Google contract with the United Nations was signed at the end of December 2002 and the search engine is expected to be available on the United Nations web sites by the second quarter of 2003. Once installed and running, an estimation will be made of the capacity that can be devoted to searching the web sites of other parts of the United Nations system. The United Nations Secretariat, along with the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, will be contacting those organizations which expressed interest in participating in the United Nations system search pilot so as to proceed as soon as possible and report to the High-Level Committee thereon at the latest at its next session in the latter part of 2003.